

Grief Recovery

Our prayer for you is that as you study these lessons on Grief Recovery, you will be able to walk through the process personally or be further equipped to help a friend or relative walk through a time of grieving. These materials present both practical as well as Biblical principles regarding what is 'normal' and what can be expected. A lie of our enemy, the devil, would like a grieving person to believe is that their case is unique and there is no help. Others have walked where you are walking today. Armed with the Word of God, close friends and a walk with a Heavenly Father who cares more than we can fathom, there is light at the end of this process. If there is any way we may assist you as a church, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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INTRODUCTION

Following are some topics that will be covered in these lessons:

- Where does sickness and death come from?
- Does God use sickness to teach us a lesson?
- Is sickness God's punishment for something I've done wrong?
- My mother or father died when I was young. People told me God needed my parent in heaven, so He took him or her. Is that true?
- What happens when a person dies?
- What if I prayed for someone and they didn't get healed?
- What is grief?
- Is denial, weeping, feeling guilty, feeling angry after a loved one dies *normal*?
- If my spouse dies, is it all right to get married again? How long should I wait?
- How do I help someone who is grieving?

This information will benefit those who have experienced the death of a loved one. It will help you gain strength and insight as you and walk through the grieving process. It will also assist you as you help a friend through the trying time after a family member has died.

This series will not make the pain instantly go away and will not provide a "quick fix" for a friend who is hurting. You will gain insights into God's Word, which will be a source of strength, comfort and valuable information.

There are different types of losses people face in their lives.

We are focusing on the loss of the life of a loved one in this series, but the loss of a job, divorce, possessions stolen or a home destroyed through fire or natural disaster are also occasions for feelings of grief and despair. This series can strengthen this person as well.

Each individual copes with loss in a different way. God understands YOUR situation and has answers, strength and comfort for you.

After loss, some may feel angry with God that He didn't heal a loved one or they may feel that He is responsible somehow for a person's death. Some may express negative feelings toward God, or that He didn't love them enough to answer their prayer. Honesty before God is where healing can begin.

Death does happen. And it does happen to those who were too young to die. It is important to maintain a firm foundation based upon truth from God's Word to us. Let us review some truths about God. Look up the following verses, then restate them in your own words:

III John 2

Ps. 27:13-14

Ps 28:8-9

Psalms 46:1-2

Ps. 56:8-10

Matthew 5:4

Philippians 4:6-9

Part I THE ORIGIN OF DEATH

Question: If God is good, and if God is all-powerful, then why do evil things such as sickness, death, war, natural disasters happen?

John 8:32

What sets us free?

KNOWING the truth sets us free.

Everyone has questions about death, and these questions can sometimes lead a person to form wrong opinions and beliefs about God. This is where hopelessness can enter into our life.

There are those who feel that God is distant, uncaring, not dependable and even the cause of evil things happening.

We must look to His very Word and form correct beliefs about God our Father and His character.

A. Death was never a part of God's plan from the beginning

God said "it is good" seven times referring to His creation

God put a choice before Adam and warned him that the wrong choice would result in death.

Genesis 2:15-17

Romans 5:12 refers to this choice Adam had. Through Adam, sin entered the world.

What we see in the world today is a corrupt and perverted version of God's original plan.

God gave man the choice to obey or disobey. He allowed man to make a mess of things, but He also reserved the right to come in and clean up the mess that man made.

B. Three Types of Death

1. Spiritual Death – the separation of the human spirit from God. This is the person who does not know Jesus as his Saviour.

2. Physical Death – the separation of the human spirit from the human body. We are made up of 3 parts:

- a. **We are a spirit** being, the part that is recreated when we are born-again.
- b. **We have a mind**, the part that thinks, makes decisions and has emotions.
- c. **We live in a body**. Our body is the house for our spirit. Our houses are what we see when we look at each other. The body is like the house you live in. There are different colours and styles of houses, but the house is not the person living inside the house.

3. Eternal Death – Eternal separation from God. Those who die not knowing Jesus as their Saviour are eternally separated from God by this death.

C. God Gives Life

It would be difficult to trust someone who was thought to bring pain and heartache to mankind.

John 10:10 Who steals, kills and destroys?

Who brings abundant life?

God is FOR life and healing and AGAINST death and sickness. Death came because of man's disobedience, but because of Jesus' obedience, we have been brought back close to God, we have the gift of life IN HIM.

D. Jesus Defeated Satan

Ephesians 1:22

I am a part of the Body of Christ and all things are put under His feet.

When Jesus died on the cross, the devil lost. He thought he won, but what Jesus did was to die in my place and your place. Because of Adam's sin, all of mankind was born into sin. When Jesus died, He took our punishment and made it possible for me to receive the gift of salvation. Salvation in the Greek (sozo) means preservation, health, healing, wholeness, prosperity as well as eternal life.

E. I'm sick, what do I do now?

When the devil comes to you with a package of sickness, we need to remind Satan that he is defeated and that the Word of God rules in my body.

Facts are subject to change. The truth never changes.

Fact: sickness has tried to attack my body

Truth: By the stripes of Jesus I WAS healed.

Fill yourself with the **truth** of God's Word about healing. Your mind has been trained to think certain ways about sickness. You need to train your mind to think like God thinks about sickness. He hates it. He wants you completely well. Nothing is too difficult for Him. He loved you enough to send His son to die in your place so that you can come close to Him. You can receive all the benefits that go along with that salvation, which include healing. Surround yourself with the Word of God, speak it, read it. Be with people who will encourage you in the things of God.

If you have heard for years that certain sicknesses are incurable, or certain conditions will have to be live with for the rest of your life, you must renew your mind to think like God thinks. Jesus took that sickness in His body on the cross SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE THAT SICKNESS IN YOUR BODY. That's why Jesus became sick, so we don't have to! Read it in the Word until you are excited about it and convince that it is true.

In studying about God's healing, you also need to remind yourself that God loves you and that He is holding nothing you have done in the past against you.

Romans 5:8 – while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We were at our ugliest, and that is when Jesus died for us. Ask for forgiveness, He is willing to forgive AND heal you!

Part 2: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

From our own perspective, death is an enemy. It separates loved ones and we feel pain and sorrow.

There is another perspective: God's.

Ps 116:15 – “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”

This verse does NOT mean that God delights in our heartache and sorrow. He offers comfort in those times. Jesus is a High Priest who can be touched with our feelings. (Heb.4:15)

Death causes people to be absent from the earth, but also causes saints to be present with the Lord. When a believer or young child dies, his spirit goes immediately into the presence of God.

We are a 3 part being

We are a spirit, we have a mind and we live in an earthly body.

Our body is what allows our spirit man to dwell in the earth. Without it, we cannot stay here.

Like an astronaut needs a space suit to survive in outer space, so do we need our “earth suit” to exist here. The space suit is not the real person, it is only what allows him to stay in an atmosphere that would not allow him to stay otherwise.

2 Corinthians 5:1, 6-8

Paul calls his body his “house”.

v.8 “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord”

Paul is pulled both ways. He wants to stay on earth in his body so he can be effective here, but he longs to be in the presence of his Father God.

Philippians 1:20-16

What does Paul mean, “to live in the flesh means fruit from my labor” and “desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.”

Departure – a nautical (ship) term referring to a ship getting ready to set sail, being put into the ocean. Paul's idea of departure was not a shipwreck, but a “ship ready”. The ship was built for the open sea, not the harbor. We were made for the presence of God. Our bodies dying means we have gone to experience the true meaning of our existence.

Peter called his body his “tent”

2 Peter 1:13-15

Better for Whom?

Paul said that it was better to be with Christ.

From a human standpoint, we never want to see someone we love depart from us.

A famous evangelist wrote of the death of his beloved wife:

“...as I awoke, the thought of my wife flooded over my mind with such power. She was gone, never to speak to me again nor would I see her face. Her children were motherless. What would I do? The Lord soon calmed my mind, for that night. Many restless nights followed and He was there each time, to comfort and strengthen me. One day, I was praying and God said to me, “You loved your wife?” “Yes,” I said. “well, did you love her for your own sake or for hers? Did you love her or yourself?” if you would think not only of your loss, but of her gain, you would not be so sorrowful when she is so joyful and happy.” At that time, there was an instant change in my entire state of being. I saw my wife not dead, but very much alive in the glories of heaven.”

A young man saw an 80 plus year old man hobbling down the street. The young man said to the old man, “how is the old man today?” The old man replied, “The old man is doing very fine indeed! But this old house has lost its thatch on the roof and the windows are so dim that the

old man can hardly see out of them. The foundation is nearly gone, and I wouldn't be surprised if by the end of winter he had to move out. But as for the old man, he's never been better! With this, he continued hobbling down the street.

Part 3: ARE SICKNESS AND DEATH A PART OF GOD'S JUDGMENT?

This is a statement from a previous lesson:

"In studying about God's healing, you also need to remind yourself that God loves you and that He is holding nothing you have done in the past against you.

Romans 5:8 – while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We were at our ugliest, and that is when Jesus died for us. Ask for forgiveness, He is willing to forgive AND heal you!"

God Judging Sin Twice is not Legal

Many Christians wrongly believe that if they sin, God will judge them for that sin.

That is not legal and it is impossible for God to do so. If you have a disease in your body and you believe it is God's judgment, listen carefully.

Why did Jesus die on the cross? (to take the punishment for all sin)

That includes my sin and your sin.

If Jesus was punished for our sin and God's anger and judgment for sin were all poured out upon Jesus, can that sin be punished for again?

In the legal system, it is not lawful for a person to be tried for the same crime twice. If a person stood trial for stealing and they were found innocent, they cannot be tried for that crime again unless certain circumstances had changed. God will not punish man for his sin twice. Take a deep breath and a sigh of relief! God is NOT angry with you!

The wages of sin is death

Now, sin does have a price, but that price doesn't come from God.

Romans 6:23 says that the wages, or payment for sin is death.

This doesn't mean you will die immediately when you sin. But sin opens the door for death to operate in your life.

The only reason a person would sin is because they don't realize who they are IN HIM. If you really believe you are a child of the Most High God, you will see sin is beneath you. A low way to live as a Child of God. God provides all you need. You don't have to cheat to get ahead, you don't have to look for acceptance and love in other places because God has provided for you and has adopted you into His family.

When a person sins, they are walking in darkness and this is where evil operates. Death in relationships, death in finances, death in your health. To deal with this, Get yourself full of the light of God's Word!

AIDS is not God's judgment on people who are not living right. He would be a completely unjust God to allow this to happen in young, innocent children or in the faithful spouse whose partner brought the disease home.

Sickness is from the devil. He doesn't care who the person is. He wants people defeated, sick, poor and dead if possible.

If a person is sick, it doesn't mean they are in sin. It means either:

1. The devil is trying to steal, kill or destroy him, he has done nothing wrong OR-
2. He has opened the door in some way.

ALL of God's judgment for sin was poured out on Jesus. If you have opened the door somehow through sin, close it now by asking God to forgive you (1 John 1:9) and then let the light of God's Word in!

Part 4: WHEN DEATH HAPPENS: DEALING WITH SHOCK AND DENIAL

Many believers surprise themselves at how well they do the days immediately following a loss. Many do not sense strong emotions immediately.

God has created humans with a system to deal with tragedy. Some may feel like they are in a "state of shock" and others may sense the presence of God's grace for them to do what needs to be done during that time.

It is completely consistent with the loving nature of God to supernaturally comfort His children and experience His peace which surpasses all understanding. (Philippians 4:7)

David wrote of a terrible situation he was in:

Psalm 46:1-5, 10, 11

God can be our refuge, the place we hide, find security and comfort in times of trouble.

The adult son of a minister was killed in a plane crash. When the father received word of the death, he immediately flew to be with his daughter-in-law and his grandchildren. All the time he was there, he sensed an enormous amount of strength and peace. A few days after he returned home, he noticed a "let-down" reaction as all of the emotions began to affect him. He said the contrast was so sharp that he almost felt like God's presence had left him. He also knew that God was still with him regardless of how he felt. Over time, he regained his sense of spiritual and emotional balance, but it didn't happen overnight.

God's grace was with him in a special way during the state of shock, and God's presence was with him when the shock wore off – even when he didn't feel that presence.

No two people are the same and reactions to various situations will be very different. No matter those differences, God's love and desire to help are always there.

Part 5: STAGES – GRIEF RECOVERY IS A PROCESS

Story:

"Before losing a loved one, I thought that there would be a period of deep sadness for a time, and then it would all be over. For me, there were several emotions that would cycle – shock, disbelief anger, sadness, tears, calmness, feeling out of control. Then I would feel fine, thinking it was finished. Then the emotions would start over again. The most difficult time was about six months after my dad's death.

"I found that recovering from grief is a process, and sometimes it's one step forward and two back. Mainly, I learned that there is a process that you go through whether you want to or not. It doesn't do any good to deny your loss. Everyone deals with separation differently. There is no right or wrong way. Don't fear the lack of control because there will come a day when you will feel normal again."

In order to benefit in learning about stages of grief, we must understand a couple of things:

First; there is a difference between **revelation** and **observation**. Revelation is that which is revealed to us by the Spirit of God. Observation is what we learn through our own senses and experiences. In looking at the phases, we are mainly examining observations.

Second: Description and Prescription: We will be looking at what can be described, or put into words. God did not prescribe that death occur in our lives, but we can describe the experience. Because of God's foreknowledge, He did "prescribe" or make available to us, His comfort and help. Grief recovery can be **described** through man's **observation**. God's comfort and help have been **prescribed** to us. His revealed truth, His **revelation** will help us, guide us and stabilize us through the challenging times of life.

Psychologists and counselors have observed phases or stages a person experiences after the death of a loved one. They are not the same for everyone, and may happen in different sequences.

As we go through these phases, remember the difference between description. These are *descriptions*, not prescriptions. It is a description of what many people go through, not a prescription for a person to follow if he or she is to grieve "properly". Every person is unique.

Phase 1: Evasion

The phase where a person is emotionally overwhelmed and tries to avoid the painful reality of what has happened. In this phase, the person may experience shock, denial, "numbness," and disbelief.

Phase 2: Encounter

Issues a person may face and need to work through may include:

- Disorganization and confusion – unable to think clearly and rationally
- Anxiety, panic and fear – fear of life without this person, panic at being able to handle responsibilities
- Physical changes – difficulty eating and sleeping as well as a lack of energy
- Explosive emotions – burst out crying, angered easily
- Guilt, remorse, and blame – many times a survivor will say, "If only I had..."
- Feelings of loss, emptiness and sadness
- Feelings of release and relief – this can be especially strong when a loved one has suffered a great deal before dying. It does not mean that the deceased was not loved, only relief that they are no longer suffering.

Phase 3: Reconciliation

The full reality of the death becomes a part of the mourner. The pain changes from being ever present, sharp and stinging to an acknowledged feeling of loss that has given a new meaning and purpose. The sense of loss does not completely disappear, yet softens. Hope returns and the person grieving is able to look to the future, knowing that the lost loved one will never be forgotten, but that his own life can and will move forward.

Another way to look at the grieving process is thus. Many of these stages you have seen in the above 3 phases.

Shock

The expression of emotion

Feelings of depression and loneliness

Physical symptoms

Panic

Guilt
Anger and resentment
Difficulty in accomplishing normal activities
Gradual resurfacing of hope
Establishing a new reality

One of the greatest tools the devil tries to use is that when facing a difficulty, we are alone. Knowing that the grieving process IS a process and that you are not alone can be a great comfort. God is with you and many who have lost loved ones have experienced what you are experiencing.

We have emotions and they are God –given!

A Christian's Emotions during Grief

As Christians, we sometimes struggle with the idea that recovery is a process that takes time. In our minds, we think that because we may know that our loved one is in heaven, we are not supposed to be sad or go through the same emotions.

We would like an automatic relief from the grief, but this is a wish that is not based on Scripture.

I Thess 4:13

The Bible does not say, "SORROW NOT." It says, "Sorrow not, as others which have no hope." Paul did not tell us not to grieve. He said not to grieve in the same way others grieve who have no hope of heaven or eternal life with God.

Vs 18 – Paul told them to comfort one another with these words.

Examples of emotions in the Bible:

Romans 12:15 – Weep with them that weep

Philippians 2:27 – If a friend of Paul's had died, he would have experienced "sorrow upon sorrow."

The type of sorrow experienced by believers is not with no hope in sight. It is experienced with the comfort of the Holy Spirit and the promises of God's Word.

This knowledge is comforting, but it does not do away with the intense pain of grief and the need for comfort.

How long does a person grieve?

No one can say how long a mourning process will last. For some, a few weeks, for others, several years.

General description of the pattern of grief:

At 3 months after the loss, the pain can be most intense and then gradually lessen.

The pain will go "up and down". At the one year anniversary of the loss, the pain may come rushing in with pain that seems like it was yesterday that the loved one was lost.

This is why we should never tell ourselves or another person that they should "be over it by now."

A major factor in grief recovery is the way a person died.

On average, if a person died a natural death (of old age), the grief recovery time is approximately two years.

If a person died from an accidental death, 3 years is average
If a person committed suicide, 4 years and if a person was murdered, 5 years.

Remember, we are looking at this process so that you may know you are not alone in your feelings of grief. The devil would like nothing more than for you to feel like you are an inferior Christian because you “can’t get it together.” These emotions are normal and you are not alone. This is great comfort for others you may know who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

Each person will grieve differently. The items we are outlining are generalized. Some may experience all of what has been described, others only certain elements. Time tables for the grieving process are as unique as the people who are grieving. It is not wise to put a time limit for recovery upon yourself or others. We can minister tenderness and mercy regardless of how long their particular recovery takes.

We sometimes are looking for a grief recovery EVENT rather than a process. We would love to have an instant relief.

Factors that influence the length of a grieving process:

There are averages and general patterns, but we are unique and will grieve differently from one another.

1. the nature of the relationship with the person who died (a closer relationship may indicate a longer grieving period)
2. the availability, helpfulness and ability of the one grieving to make use of a support system such as family, friends, church. (It is helpful if support is available and if the grieving person is open to receive that help)
3. the unique characteristics of the bereaved person (strength of character and the ability of the person to handle stress)
4. the unique characteristics of the person who died
5. the nature of the death (as mentioned previously)
6. the person’s religious and cultural history (a strong system of beliefs will assist in the grieving process)
7. other crises or stresses in the person’s life
8. previous experiences with death (the death of many close people will make grieving more difficult)
9. the social expectations based on the sex of the survivor (women are expected to grieve differently than men)
10. the ritual or funeral experience. (the funeral can be a beautiful “see you later” ceremony or it can be a reminder of the great loss and hopelessness of the situation.)

Part 6: HELPING THOSE WHO GRIEVE

What do I do when I or someone else grieving seem to make one step forward and two steps back in the grieving process?

- Find meaningful scriptures that comfort and strengthen you when you face unpleasant emotions. Remember that feelings come and go, but God’s Word abides forever.
- Remind yourself that God is good and that He is with you no matter what feelings you experience. He is faithful to His promises

- Stay involved with other people and with your church. This is where additional strength and support during your recovery.
- Be gracious to yourself. Give yourself time. Don't get down on yourself, condemn yourself for not being stronger or assume there is something wrong with you if you feel out of sorts for a while.
- Find a friend who respects what you're going through and will allow you to talk about what you're feeling.
- Talk to God. Express yourself to Him. Don't be embarrassed or withdraw from Him if there are parts of the process that are especially difficult. He understands and He cares.
- Keep a journal. Some people express themselves best in writing. Much of the book of Psalms could be considered David's journal. He often described distressing situations and emotions he was experiencing. (Psalm 23, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...") He didn't deny the reality of the situation, but he affirmed his faith that God was with him through the situation.
- Make positive decisions. Negative feelings tend to paralyze people, causing them to withdraw from daily life. Do what you need to do in spite of how you feel. Instead of waiting for your feelings to change, make decisions to do the right thing now. Feelings will change over time.
- Remember that the feelings now won't last forever.

It's OK to Cry

Sometimes Christians say, "Oh, I heard your father died. Well, Praise the Lord, he's in Heaven! You don't have anything to be concerned about!"

These comments are insensitive. A comment like, "I heard your father died. I'm so sorry for your loss" spoken sincerely can be of great comfort.

Some have been taught that if a person really has faith, they will not or should not experience any kind of negative emotions after the death of a loved one. This is not in line with the Bible.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 "there is a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance."

Matthew 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

John 11:35 Jesus wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus.

Acts 8:2 godly men who buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

What do we do for someone who is grieving?

Some people are uncomfortable with their own emotions and are especially uncomfortable around others who may be experiencing emotional turmoil.

To avoid personal discomfort, many simply try to avoid the bereaved.

They try to justify keeping their distance by telling themselves "they probably want to be alone."

Some people believe it is a sign of weakness, especially for men, to express emotions. As a result, they suppress their emotions and are embarrassed to cry or show sadness. They may feel like they have to be strong and show others their "great faith."

The other extreme is this:

They not only express their emotion, but they are continually controlled by their feelings. We understand that a person may feel overcome by a strong emotional reaction, but our feelings are not meant to rule or dominate us on a permanent basis.

Example: David

David expressed openly and honestly what he felt in various circumstances. He did not deny the reality of his feelings, but neither did he allow them to rule him. He poured out his heart before God and allowed God to help him through what he was experiencing.

1 Samuel 30:1-6

David and his men had been out to battle and came home to find their wives, children and all possessions had been taken and the town burned.

David's reaction is in verse 4.

Verse 6, David did not hastily make a decision as to his next step. He first strengthened himself in God.

He was human enough to have emotions and express them, but when he needed to make a decision to move forward, he did so. David didn't "set up camp" in the "valley of the shadow of death." He reminded himself that God was with him.

God gave us the ability to feel. To feel pain and to experience joy. But He did not create you for those feelings to rule you. Talk to God about what you are feeling. Be honest with Him. He will not be offended by your emotions. He wants to walk through those emotions with you.

Hebrews 4:15-16 – Jesus is our High Priest and he knows what we go through. We can then come boldly to Him when we need help

Psalms 30:11 – He turns mourning into dancing

Isaiah 60:20 – Your days of mourning shall be ended.

As humans, we can tend to run from God when we need Him most. Turn to God. He is ready and willing to walk with you through whatever experiences you may be facing.

Psalms 46:1 – God is an ever-present HELP in time of trouble.

Part 7: WHAT ABOUT FEELINGS OF GUILT?

We learned to run TO God instead of away from Him when we are in a time of crises.

Sometimes, we can be our own worst enemy. No one around us blames us for the death of the loved one, but the thoughts we think about ourselves are those of unforgiveness, regret and "I should or shouldn't have..."

Here are some comments of those going through this very situation:

-“I felt that in some way I had failed her.”

-“the guilt and regret was really challenging. I longed to go back and relive those moments and do them differently. I was so sorry for the missed opportunities. I had been selfish...”

-“I felt relieved when my mom died. She had been ill for a very long time, and we had watched her slowly get worse for many years. I felt so guilty for feeling relieved that she had died.”

-“I was eight when my mom died. I felt responsible for some reason. I felt guilty if I cried. I felt guilty when I didn't cry. I felt guilty when I started to love and accept my step mom. I felt guilty that I didn't tell my mom I loved her before I had gone to school that morning. I even felt guilty as I grew older when people told me how much I reminded them of my mom. Guilt was ruining my life.”

Experiencing a loss can cause us to begin to evaluate ourselves. We may begin to criticize everything we said or did as well as what we *didn't* say or do.

This kind of self-criticism is extremely harsh, but also unfair when we judge ourselves as though we knew what was about to happen.

For example, if I did not realize that someone was near death and we did not do something we later wish we had done, we judge ourselves as though we had known he or she was going to die...or we think we *should* have known.

Guilt can be real or false

False guilt – Example: a daughter stays by her mother's side all through a long sickness, and at a time the daughter is away from her, she dies. The daughter feels guilty after the death for not being there for her mother at the time of her death. In reality, her devotion to her mother should be commended.

This kind of guilt requires REASSURANCE, not forgiveness.

I John 3:19-20

We ourselves sometimes feel we have done something wrong when we haven't. God is greater than these thoughts. How do we assure our hearts? By the Word of God. Scriptures on peace, guarding the heart, casting our cares.

Genuine Guilt – If we have done something that is wrongdoing or sin, we need to ask God to forgive us and then forgive ourselves as well.

A normal person with a conscience that is tender will feel guilty for wrongdoing.

Read Psalm 51:1-10 to see how King David repented after his wrongdoing regarding Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah.

Part 8: MOVING ON

The hardest person to forgive is our own self.

We can ask ourselves, "what if a friend had made the same mistake I have made. How would I respond if they asked for forgiveness?"

Continually abusing one's self by feelings of guilt is a way of trying to make up for past wrongs. As though punishment by being miserable for a long time will somehow atone for the guilt or shame.

These people answer the above question with, "I would forgive my friend. I would tell them to move on in life"

We often are harder on ourselves than on others.

How long will you let Guilt make a slave of you?

Here is a story to illustrate how guilt makes slaves of a person:

A little boy visiting his grandparents was given his first sling shot (catapult). He wasn't very good, so he practiced in the bush near the house. He could never hit his target.

As he came back to Grandma's house, he saw her pet duck. On impulse, he took aim and let the stone fly. The stone hit, and the duck fell dead.

The boy panicked. He hid the dead bird in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today, didn't you, Johnny?" She leaned over and whispered to her brother, "Remember the duck." Johnny stayed and helped in the kitchen.

Later, Grandpa asked if the children wanted to fishing. Grandma said, "I'm sorry, I need Sally to help me make dinner." Sally smiled and said, "That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it." Again she whispered, "Remember the duck!" Johnny stayed home while his sister went fishing with Grandfather.

After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's, he couldn't stand it any more. He confessed to his Grandma that he had killed the duck.

"I know, Johnny," she said giving him a hug. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave of you."

We can ask ourselves the same question when we are struggling with guilt. How long are we going to let guilt make a slave of us. Before we were born, God knew every mistake we would ever make and He still chooses to love us. He still sent Jesus to die for our sins and to take away our guilt and shame. We don't have to be a slave to guilt, shame or condemnation.

Leader: You may lead your group in a simple prayer such as the one following:

"Dear Father, I realize that I have fallen short of being the person I would have liked to have been in _____ situation. There are things I did or didn't do that I wish were different. I did not appreciate or value my time with _____ the way I should have and I am feeling regret and guilt over all of this.

I know you love me and I ask you to forgive me for areas where I was less than perfect. Thank you that you are merciful and forgiving. I receive Your forgiveness now in Jesus' Name. Help me to remember the good times and to focus on the positive aspects of our relationship. I thank you for helping me to become the person You want me to be."

Staying Free From Guilt

Feelings can take time to get through.

If feelings of guilt remain, don't assume you've been a failure in dealing with them. Don't allow them to stay in your mind.

Phillippians 4:8 tells us what we SHOULD think on...Guilt is not listed there.

No matter what the reason for the feelings of guilt, whether we need reassurance or forgiveness, as discussed last lesson, God is present to meet our every need.

Part 9: I'M SO ANGRY!

We have learned that it is okay to cry when we grieve.

We see that sadness and sorrow are understandable emotions.

But what about ANGER? Isn't anger a sin?

Anger is a type of protest to something unfair, unjust, or when something or someone we value is taken from us.

We may say it out loud or feel it in ourselves, but something inside says, "this is not fair! This is not right! I object! I protest!"

Look at these statements:

"I was so angry with my dad after he died. He kept making wrong decisions until it ended his life."

"I was angry at the doctors for letting this happen and angry at God for letting it happen."

Jesus was angry, but without sin!

Mark 3:1-5

John 2:13-17

The end result of these 2 episodes was positive, not negative.

Ephesians 4:26, 27, 30-32

"don't sin by letting anger gain control over you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry for anger gives a mighty foothold to the devil."

One widow's perspective:

"If one more person says to me that I should be glad my husband is in heaven with Jesus, I'm going to scream! I know he's with Jesus, and I know he's experiencing the wonders of Heaven. But I'm not! I'm stuck down here with the bills and all the problems that are left behind. I'm really mad at him for getting to enjoy all the glory of Heaven while I'm stuck here trying to get through all these problems without him. I'm so angry at him and then I feel guilty for being angry."

What this woman needs is a supportive friend who will not criticize her for her selfish attitude, but will encourage her as she deals with the overwhelming time of change in her life.

When people are experiencing grief, their normal judgment and words can be greatly altered.

Anger can be felt more strongly in an unjust situation like a child hit by a drunk driver, a person killed in a robbery, or an act of terrorism.

How did Jesus react to a great injustice?

The Murder of John the Baptist

How did Jesus react to the unjust murder of his cousin, John?

John spoke against the wrong relationships King Herod had with women.

A young lady danced for Herod, he liked it and promised anything she wanted. The girl went to her mother, who was a mistress of the king, and asked what she should ask the King for. The mother, being full of hate for John because of his statements about Herod's relationships, asked for John's head on a platter.

Herod regretted his promise, but because he didn't want to look bad to his visitors, he ordered it to be done.

A prophet of God was murdered.

How did Jesus react?

Matthew 14:13

Jesus went off by himself. He was hurting.

Heb 4:15

Jesus faced the same feelings we face, yet without sin.

The power of forgiveness:

Forgiveness is NOT approving of an evil action or saying what was done was right. It does not say, "What you did was acceptable."

Forgiveness does NOT mean you place yourself in a position to be continually abused or hurt. Forgiveness is NOT forgetting. We can mentally recall an event, but we don't have to let those events dominate our present.

Forgiveness is NOT reconciliation. Reconciliation requires repentance on the part of the one who did the wrong so that a relationship can be restored. We can forgive a person who has offended whether or not they are repentant.

Forgiveness does NOT mean all unpleasant feelings immediately leave.

We don't forgive necessarily for the benefit of the one who wronged us. It is our way of releasing bitterness and rage that would continually hold us captive. The person you free when you forgive is really yourself.

Steps to overcoming anger:

1. Talk to God about what you're going through. Don't resist Him when you need Him the most. God is not the problem, He is the answer.
2. Identify and express your anger in a constructive manner. Admitting you are angry exposes it to the light.
3. Make an inventory of your thought life. Get your thinking in line with God's Word.
4. Discipline yourself to feed positive decisions and act on them. Negative thoughts and actions don't go away because we resist them one time. What "replacement thoughts" do you have ready for the negative thoughts? It may help to write them down.

Part 10: TOUGH QUESTIONS

Human suffering happens NOT because God causes it or even because He wants or wills it to happen. Suffering happens because we live on a planet that is in rebellion, a race that is living outside of God's will. The result is sickness and death. Even though we are new creatures in Christ, we are still part of this world.

Believers have the responsibility to minister comfort in a compassionate way. When life is disappointing, people need a "comfortor", not a "condemner". Sometimes we lose a battle, but it doesn't mean we've lost the war. We don't have to quit after the battle. We can still win the war.

When an unexpected OR expected death occurs, most people have question. There are 4 that are most common:

1. Did I do something wrong?
This question deals with *guilt*
2. Did I not have faith?
This question deals with *doubt*.
3. Why? Why did this happen?
This question deals with *confusion*.
4. Can I ever trust God again?
This question deals with *fear*.

Let's look at each question one by one:

Did I do something wrong?

Some people believe that if something bad happens, there must have been sin or disobedience. The calamity was God's judgment for their wrong-doing.

In the Bible we see 3 different situations in which people experienced "storms."

1. A storm that came because of disobedience – Jonah was sent to Nineveh specifically by God and he disobeyed. A great storm came that affected his life greatly.
2. A storm that came in the midst of perfect obedience – The disciples were instructed by Jesus to "go over to the other side" and they were doing just that. A storm came and affected their lives. It did not mean that they were in disobedience or sin. (Mk 4:35)
3. A storm because of the disobedience of others – Paul encountered a violent storm because even though he warned those in the ship that there would be a storm, they continued with their journey.

It is unscriptural, unmerciful and insensitive to assume that any person experiencing difficulties is in that position because they committed a sin.

Did I not have faith?

Some may ask, "I prayed for a loved one to be healed, but they weren't healed. Does this mean that my faith is small or ineffective?"

We see in the Word of God people using their faith to obtain specific results, like healing, and that pleased Jesus.

But it is also important to realize that our faith must be focused on something bigger than the result alone. The focus of our faith must be on the Person, God Himself.

Your faith is not ineffective just because you prayed and didn't see the answer you wanted. IT TAKES FAITH TO CONTINUE BELIEVING! To believe that:

-God created us and loves us

-God has forgiven us

-Our bodies will be gloriously be resurrected

-We will be reunited and live forever with Jesus.

Our faith is not based on understanding everything that happens in life. Genuine faith in God determines to believe in God, regardless of negative situations. That is mature faith.

Why did this happen?

In a disturbing situation where there seems to be no answer, the more a person focuses on what he doesn't know, the more confused and disturbed he becomes. BUT the more a person focuses on what he *does* know (*God loves me, God is faithful, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, God will never leave me or forsake me*), the more at peace he becomes.

We can say, "Lord, I don't understand why this happened and I don't see the answer. I leave the situation in Your hands. If you choose to show me something, fine. But I will walk in the light of what I do know and praise Your for Your goodness.

Some people believe that if they just knew why, all problems concerning the loved one's death would be solved. There would still be emotional adjustments to make and they would still be missed.

Can I ever trust God again?

In any situation where we feel like the answer we wanted didn't come, we have a choice to make: We can either choose to look at the situation OR we can look at the Word.

We can say, *"I prayed for a person and he died. It must have been God's will for him to die. Maybe the teachings I've heard about healing aren't true or they aren't for me. I thought could trust God, but I guess not."*

OR we can say, *"I prayed for a person and he died. I don't understand why he didn't receive healing, but I don't have to understand everything. I'm going to trust in the Lord with all my heart. It is disappointing, and I look to the Father for comfort. I choose not to be bitter. God is faithful and I'll keep walking with Him."*

Paul was convinced of God's love and faithfulness.
Hebrews 13:5 says God will never leave us or forsake us.
With this understanding, we can refuse all that the devil would bring to try to torment us.

We can say no to the condemnation he tries to bring
You can say no to the doubt he tries to put in your mind
You can say no to the confusion he tries to bring
You can say no to fear he tries to bring.

Direct the focus of your faith NOT to circumstances, but to the Object of our faith, the Father God.

What happens to babies who die too young?

They never had an opportunity to receive Jesus
See what God thinks of children (born and unborn) in these scriptures:
Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15; Mark 10:13-16

Romans 7:9

Paul is saying that there was a time as a young child that he had no knowledge of sin, but he reached an age where there was a consciousness of sin and he died. It is this that we refer to the "age of accountability" realizing the need for a saviour.

This age is different for all.

What about talking to our relatives who have died?

For centuries, people have sought to contact and communicate with their ancestors.

The Bible strongly and specifically denounces it.

Leviticus 19:26 and 31; 20:6-7; Deut 18:9-14; Is 8:19-20

People who appear to converse with the deceased are operating one of two ways:

They are either using tricks to make a grieving person think they are in contact with your relative
OR

We see that the Holy Spirit conveys information to believers that would otherwise not be known by our human minds. Likewise, evil spirits can convey information to human minds that would not be known. This is what we call a "familiar spirit." Or, an evil spirit that is familiar with the person who has deceased.

Our hope as believers relies in the truth of God's revealed word in us.

What if someone commits suicide?

We minister differently to someone who is contemplating suicide than to someone who is grieving the loss of someone by suicide.

Before Suicide: Suicide is not God's will for His children.

Here are 5 principles in the Word concerning suicide:

1. It is a violation of God's command not to murder (Ex 20:13) Suicide is the murder of one's self.
2. It is a violation of God's command to not love ourselves. (Matt 22:37-39) We are to love our neighbor and ourselves.
3. It is a violation of God's command that we honor our bodies as His temple (I Cor 6:19) Our bodies belong to God. By destroying it, we are destroying someone else's property.
4. God's plan is that our life be a blessing to other people. (Rm 13:10) Suicide brings tremendous heartache to the family and loved ones. It damages more than just the victim.
5. It is contrary to the fulfilling of God's plan for our life. (Jer 29:11) No one can fulfill God's plan for his life if he removes himself from the earth.

After Suicide: In ministering to a person who has lost a loved one to suicide, it is important to emphasize the mercy of God.

As Jesus hung on the cross, He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing."

There may be pressures, mental illnesses or internal circumstances that we know nothing about. God is the Righteous and Merciful Judge.

The idea many people have of going to heaven is that a person turns into some type of vapor or mist floating in the clouds. God created mankind in 3 parts, spirit, soul and body and that is how we will live for all of eternity.

There is a season of time that the body is separated from the spirit after a person dies.

What happens when we die?

When we die, the spirit is separated from the body. If a person is born again, his spirit goes to heaven. If not, his spirit goes to hell. The body is put in the ground.

What will it be like when Jesus comes back?

Jesus is coming back with all of the Christians who have died before us. Their bodies will rise from the grave and be rejoined with their spirits.

Job 19:25-26 – Job knew that his flesh would one day stand before God.

John 5:25, 28, 29 –All in the graves will hear the voice of the son of God and come forth.

To accept this truth requires faith, especially since we see our bodies getting older and we know that our body will eventually die. (2 Cor. 4:16)

I Cor 15:51-54

Shows the reality of the future resurrection of every believer.

In vs 20 and 23, Jesus is called the “firstfruits” of from the dead.

I Thess 4:13 – 18

The spirit and the body are involved in the resurrection.

“God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.”

The Church Age will come to a close at this time and we will reign in our spirit, soul and body, with Jesus for all eternity.